A Short Oral History of the Middlebury College Snow Bowl - The Early Years

By: Jim Murdoch '65

This article grew out of the author's Master of Ceremonies duties at the first ever Middlebury College Ski Patrol Reunion which was held at the Snow Bowl on March 7, 1998. Euphemistically dubbed a "vertically integrated affinity group" by the College planners, the reunion coincidentally and unintentionally coincided with the 50th anniversary of our founding. This early history was developed through many conversations with the some 175 members and families that attended, from their recollections and their many fond and sometimes fading memories, old photos and papers. A special thanks to Bob Reed ('49), Allan "Whitey" Frew ('48), Ernest Gilmont ('50), Bob Bishop ('52), Peter Mackey - Snow Bowl Director ('74) and Steve Paquette, the Ski Patrol Director.

Virtually every story of recreational skiing in America as we know it today had its genesis from the returning troops of the famed U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division. As the New York Times reported on April 8, 1996:

> "For the second generation of the ski business, we can be especially grateful they came home and founded many of the 500 ski areas in the country . . . They touched every ski area in the nation."

As with neighboring Stowe and Mad River Glen, the early members of the Middlebury Ski Patrol cut the trails which form the nucleus of the Snow Bowl that existed until its reconfiguration in the early 1970's. Professor Voter, head of the Chemistry Department and the Outing Club and for whom the Voter trail is named, was usually in charge. The trails now on the front of the Snow Bowl owe much to Professor Voter's leadership and the hard work of the men and women of the early patrol.

The Middlebury College Ski Patrol was officially known as the Breadloaf Ski Patrol. It was founded in 1948. Credit for its formation goes to Robert Reed, its patrol leader, a 10th Mountain Division member, who stated he was "well wounded" in the Italian Alps. This was Bob's personal motivation for founding an organization for the help and evacuation of injured skiers when he came home to Middlebury. With donated surplus toboggans and a compliment of 40 persons, most of whom were women as many of the men were still in the service, the ski patrol performed a "noteworthy job" at Winter Carnival in 1948. (See Photo) Co-founders of the patrol were Joseph Jones who managed the Snow Bowl for many years after and Coach Joseph "Red" Kelley, the First Aid Instructor, who later became the Athletic Director and whose wife, Elizabeth "Ma" Kelley, later was the Dean of Women. (See photos) The members' duties included first aid instruction to others and treatment and evacuation of the injured at the Breadloaf Snow Bowl, Chipman Hill where the old 35 meter intercollegiate jump was located and from in and around the campus all popular student ski areas after the war. (See 1948 Yearbook). Allan "Whitey" Frew ('48), dubbed the oldest member to respond to the reunion, recalls rescuing a student who broke his leg skiing behind the campus. He recalls having to improvise by splinting his break with a ski and hauling him back up the hill to the campus.

By many accounts, the early patrol was a well-trained but "disorganized bunch." In 1950 under the impetus of its leader, Bob Bishop, the patrol received its National Ski Patrol affiliation. Bishop rewrote the constitution and changed the name officially to the Middlebury College Ski Patrol on October 5, 1950. (See constitution) He and others, including patroller Ernie Gilmont, were two of the six who received the first ever

National Ski Patrol numbers at Middlebury. Gilmont reports that he still has his National patch and number 1222. However, in order to be certified by the National, the Middlebury patrol needed a sponsor outside of the Snow Bowl area. Members spent weekends training at Stowe and at Mad River Glen. Mad River eventually sponsored its entry into the National. Someone convinced the College to donate a shack which became the Ski Patrol shack located at the bottom of the mountain. The patrol painted a big cross on it. It is now used for storage and is behind and between the lodge and the Sheehan chair lift. The patrol wore backpacks, orange sweaters (the official color of the National Ski Patrol) with crosses on the back and shoulders emblazoned with their National Ski Patrol patches and well earned numbers. (See photo Bob Reed)

While Middlebury College from the early '30s on was usually in contention for the intercollegiate racing honors, these were also heady times for the infant sport of recreational skiing. As the 1952 yearbook exhorts:

> "With a ski fever as prevalent as it is at Middlebury, a capable, well-trained ski patrol is a must . . . To a stricken skier, a capable member of the ski patrol bearing down upon him looks even better than a Saint Bernard with a cask around his neck . . . " (See Yearbook)

But, the patrol was busy off the slopes as well. Springs and summers continued to occupy the patrolmens' time clearing brush and chopping trails. All of the members were required by the National Ski Patrol to have up-to-date first aid certification and training. The patrol members soon discovered it was easier for each of them to be Red Cross First Aid Instructors as recertification was easier and less frequent.

Ernie Gilmont, one of the early members, reports that patrollers carried their first aid packs in their cars and were issued special license plates with a red cross on them by the Vermont State Police. Long prior to the good samaritan laws in Vermont, ski

patrollers performed the duties of today's local rescue squads. Middlebury patrollers were often the first to assist and give first aid at the scene of an accident. Patrollers also offered instruction in first aid outside of the college. Gilmont recalls training a group of nurses in emergency first aid in Vergennes. While they were skilled nurses, they had to be taught basic first aid techniques such as how to tie a bandage with a square knot so that it could be easily undone if they didn't have scissors available to cut it off.

The patrol established by Bishop in the 50's was the beginning of the patrol that we know today. The patrollers in the '60s were spared from cutting trails, but spent time on the slopes setting poles for races and rescuing those who had skidded off the usually icy Allen and the Ross's moguls into the soft snow of the woods. Injuries had changed little from the '50s. The patrol of the '60s concentrated on the boot top fracture utilizing first wooden box leg splits, then cardboard ones, wire traction femur splints and the "Stowe backboard" for full body traction for head or neck injuries. Admission in the patrol required a completion of the First Aid Instructor's course, a skiing test and simulated rescues usually held on the iciest, coldest and snowiest days. Members were required to successfully negotiate the Allen and the Ross with a fully loaded "patient" on a backboard. This training was important as in the 1965 Winter Carnival, a jumper from Yale sailed off the 50 meter jump and landed on his head. Read McLean ('65) single handedly applied full body traction to the skier, back-boarded him and got him to the Porter Hospital in record time. For that, Read received a National Ski Patrol award for best rescue. The patrol and its leader were also honored by the National as the best college ski patrol and patrol leader.

The Snow Bowl of the '60s was under the regime of Ralph Myhre after whom the golf course is named. His assistant, part ski patroller, part race coordinator and "jack of all trades," Howard Kelton later became Snow Bowl director and was an informal and consistent member of our patrol. Evolution of the Snow Bowl coincided with the growth of skiing and the expansion of Snow Bowl. The trail system established in the early '50s was pretty much the same. The old downhill trail from the top of the Poma was transformed into the Proctor with its treacherous waterfall at the bottom. The old rope tow and the 15 meter jump can still be seen in the growth of new pine trees behind the base of the Sheehan lift as you go up towards the Gap Road. This was long abandoned in the early '70s. The rope tow on the front of the Allen was replaced by a Poma lift, and the Poma was replaced in 1969 by the relocated double on the front of the mountain. That same year, the Poma was moved to the back of the mountain and then later replaced by the present triple. You can still see the lift towers from the original Poma on the back of the Lang trail. The Sheehan lift which serves the Lang and the racing trails was erected in 1985 and replaced another early Poma lift. The original log cabin "warming hut" sits across the parking lot from the Starr Lodge which was completed in 1962. (See Carnival photo - 1964). The famous or infamous 50 meter jump is still visible through the brush from the Lodge's deck.

Visitors to the new ski patrol "shack" today are amazed at its facilities, its radios, internet connection and even a woodstove, a far cry from the '50s shack and our one room, one bed patrol room off the mens room in the newly erected Starr Lodge.

Technology, however, is only window dressing. Many of those who attended the ski patrol reunion, like myself, have become fair weather skiers. No more -20° days, icy

winds and 14 layers of wool clothes. Many, unfortunately, do not ski any more; but, to a man (and woman) in the spirit of the evening, there wasn't, however, a person ready to strap on a pack and sweep the Bowl just one last time.

This short history ends in 1965. One participant quipped that everyone in the '70s was in a purple haze and doesn't remember; the '80s, as we know them, don't count; and, everyone is here and now in the '90s, so there is no further history. Accordingly, the next reunion is scheduled in 50 years.

The author, Jim Murdoch, was the leader of the ski patrol in 1965. He lives in Shelburne Vermont. He still skies at the Snow Bowl where he keeps in touch with classmates and friends from his era.

TO: JIM MURDOCH
FROM: WHITEY FREW

PAGE FROM '48 YEARBOOK

SKI PATROL

A new addition this year to the many organizations on the Midd campus was the Ski Patrol, which proved highly successful during the winter months. With the prevention of accidents as its prime objective, the Ski Patrol urges ski courtesy and helps insure safety by zoning and marking the dangerous areas of the slope, filling in sitz marks, and generally supervising the ski areas. The care and evacuation of ski casualties is the second way in which the Patrol serves.

Credit for the Patrol's formation and development falls to Robert Reed, its leader, to Joseph Jones, who worked with Mr. Reed, and to Coach John Kelly who gave the First Aid instruction. The idea of a ski patrol was suggested last year by some literature sent by Mr. Harold M. Gore, director of the National Ski Patrol, Eastern division. No tangible advances were made on the idea until this year when Mr. Reed and Mr. Jones decided to form a ski patrol with a First Aid Committee for Carnival in mind.

To the Rescue

Thirty hours of First Aid with emphasis on ski accidents, ski equipment and clothing, a knowledge of splints, bandages and instruction in the handling of toboggans and their accessories were decided upon as the necessary training for tryouts. Mr. French, in charge of the finance and management of college skiing, realized the necessity of such a patrol in view of the greatly increased participation in skiing at Middlebury and volunteered his guidance. With this authorization and with the equipment promised by Mr, French, the Ski Patrol was able to get under way.

Throughout the ski events during Carnival weekend the Ski Patrol did a noteworthy job on the Breadloaf trails, attempting to control and evacuate the accidents that could so easily occur. The patrol, which is to be carried on from year to year, maintaining a constant number of members, now consists of forty persons.

Coming Up Breadloaf Tow

The Middlebury College Ski Patrol

CONSTITUTION

October 5, 1950

The Breadloaf Ski Patrol

CONSTITUTION

new ~~Breadloaf~~ name

Middlebury College

Article I — Name : This organization shall be known as the ~~Breadloaf~~ Ski Patrol. It is a member of the National Ski Patrol System.

Article II — Purpose : Ths purpose of the Breadloaf Ski Patrol shall be to promote greater safety in the sport of skiing; to plan and maintain safety factors at the Middlebury Snow Bowl; to render prompt, efficient first aid to all victims of skiing accidents and other injured; and to comply with all the rules and regulations of the National Ski Patrol System.

Article III — Membership

A. Tryouts

1. Any student having successfully completed the standard and advanced Red Cross courses in first aid may be considered eligible as a tryout for the patrol.

2. Any student having successfully completed the test of skiing ability as prescribed by the patrol leader may be considered eligible as a tryout for the patrol.

(2) 3. Any student to be considered eligible as a regular member of the patrol must serve at least one semester as a tryout under the patrol.

B. Regular Members (1.) Students having successfully completed all the requirements of a tryout are automatically considered for membership of the patrol, subject to approval by a majority vote of the patrol.

(2.)

Article IV — Elections

~~A.~~ General Conditions

1. Each year elections shall be held not earlier than March 15th and not later than May 15th for the officers for the following year.

2. At these elections the patrol shall elect a patrol leader and a secretary-treasurer.

3. These officers shall serve for the subsequent college year.

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2. He shall read the minutes of the previous meeting at every meeting of the patrol.

3. He shall file all correspondance and assist the patrol leader in all secretarial matters concerning the patrol. to call preside at meeting in the absence of the patrol

4. He shall register his name and that of the patrol leader in a joint checking account with the National Bank of Middlebury at the beginning of each school year and be responsible for the maintenance of that account throughout the year. All checks must bear the signatures of both the patrol,leader and the secretary-treasurer, and these officers jointly shall have the ultimate decisions on all financial matters.

5. The secretary-treasurer shall ~~s[illegible]~~ make a financial report at the first meeting of each semester and at the last meeting of the year.

C. Group Leader : He shall aid and assist the patrol leader in all duti and responsibilities concerning the patrol.

D. Regular Member

1. He shall be responsible to the patrol leader and the group leaders whenever so assigned.

2. He shall be responsible for renewing his advanced Red Cross card each year.

E. Tryouts : All tryouts shall assist the regular members of the patrol whenever needed or assigned throughout their tryout period.

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Article V~~I~~ — Resignations and ~~Withdrawals~~ Dismissals

A. Resignations

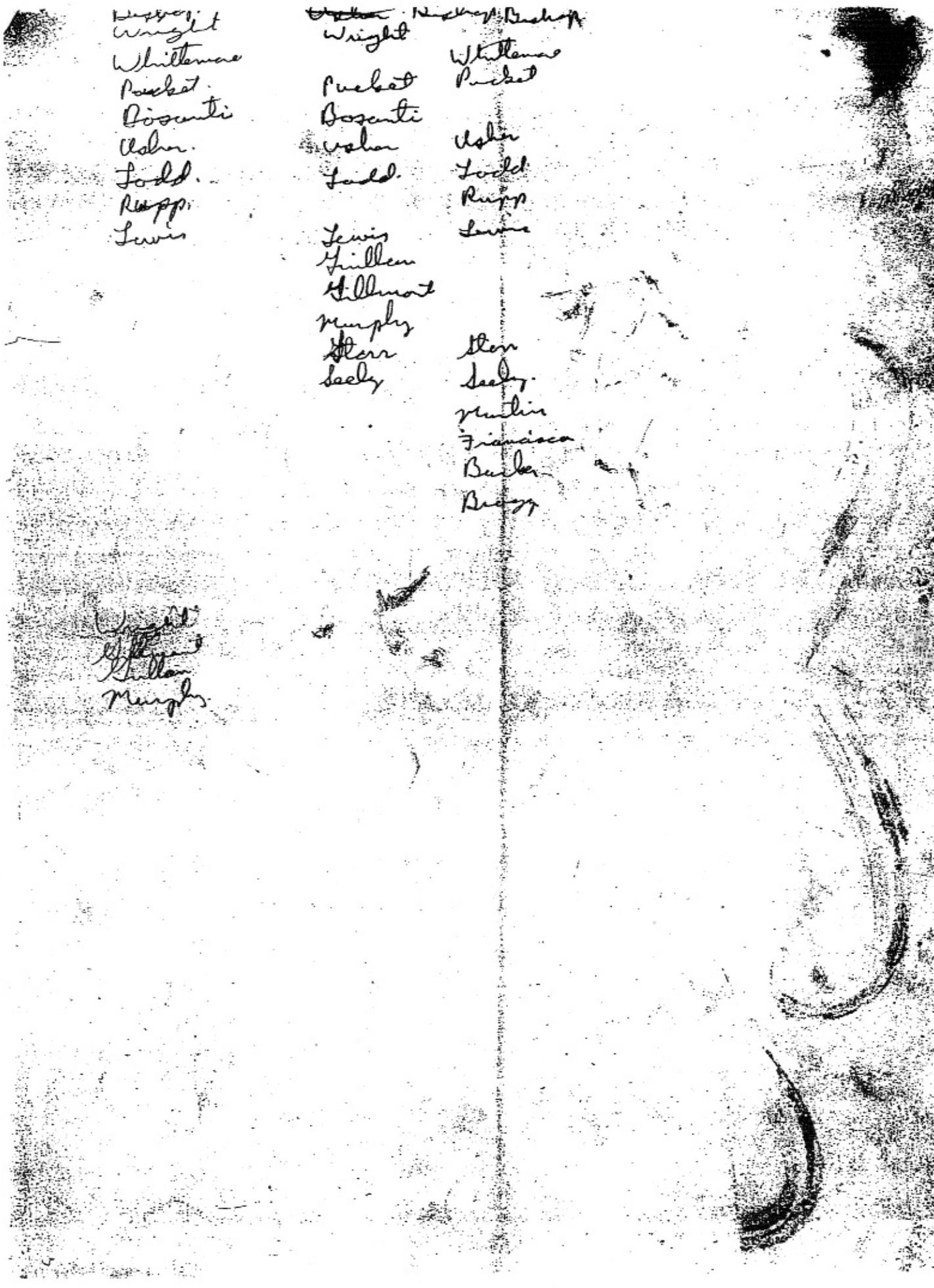
1. The officers shall submit to the patrol at a special meeting called by the patrol leader their written resignations.

2. Regular members of the patrol shall submit written resignations to the patrol leader at least one week prior to resignation date.

B. ~~Withdrawals~~ Dismissals ; Any regular member of the patrol (including officers) may be removed from the patrol at any time by a majority vote of the total patrol.

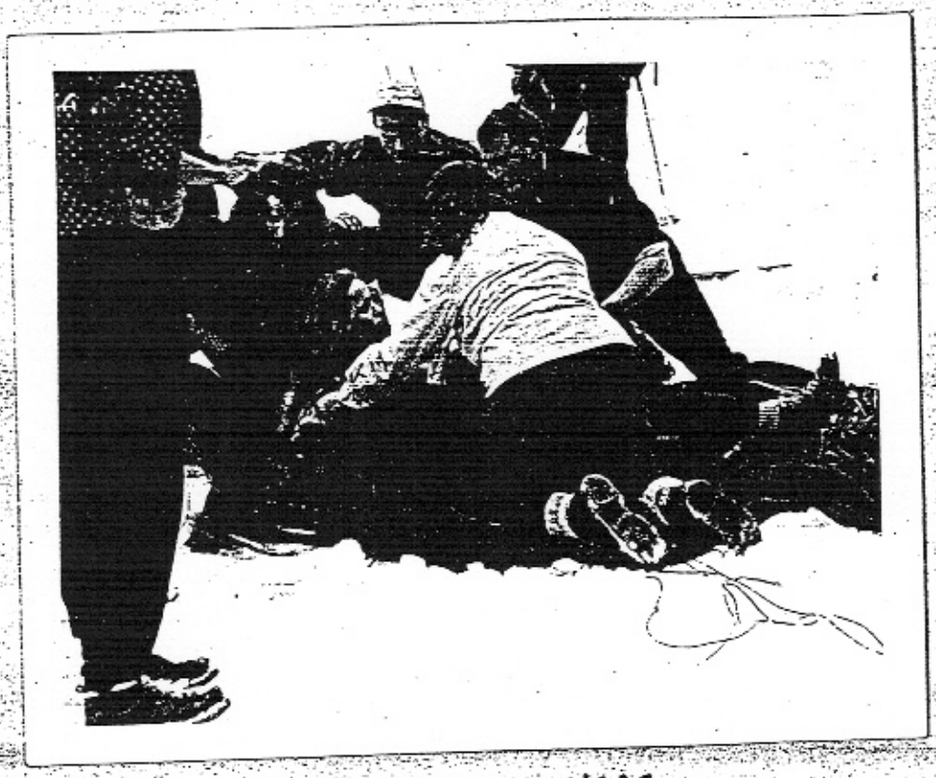
Article VI~~I~~ — Amendments : This constitution may be amended at any time by a 2/3 vote of the total number of regular members of the Bread-loaf Patrol. If this amendment is then passed by the Student Life Committee and the Student assembly, it shall become effective.

article VII - Advisor: This organization shall have a faculty advisor according to the rules of the Student Life Committee



Rob Reed - 48
one of our most
famous wearers in our
ski wear dress
(photo courtesy Rob Reed)

Ski Patrol Canada on -
most men use skill in services
area



SICA PATROL IN ACTION C1948
(photo courtesy Bob Reed)

Back: Barton, Whittemore, Seeley, Francisco
Front: Gilmont, Rupp, Bishop, leader

Back: Stokke, president; Reiland, Bishop
Front: Strong, Hildreth

Ski Patrol

With ski fever as prevalent as it is at Middlebury, a capable, well trained ski patrol is a must. Led by Bob Bishop, the Middlebury contingent carefully patrols the Breadloaf slopes every day during the winter months, in an attempt to keep the novice snow-bunnies from fracturing anything vital. In case of accidents, the patrol administers first aid and rushes the victim to the hospital.

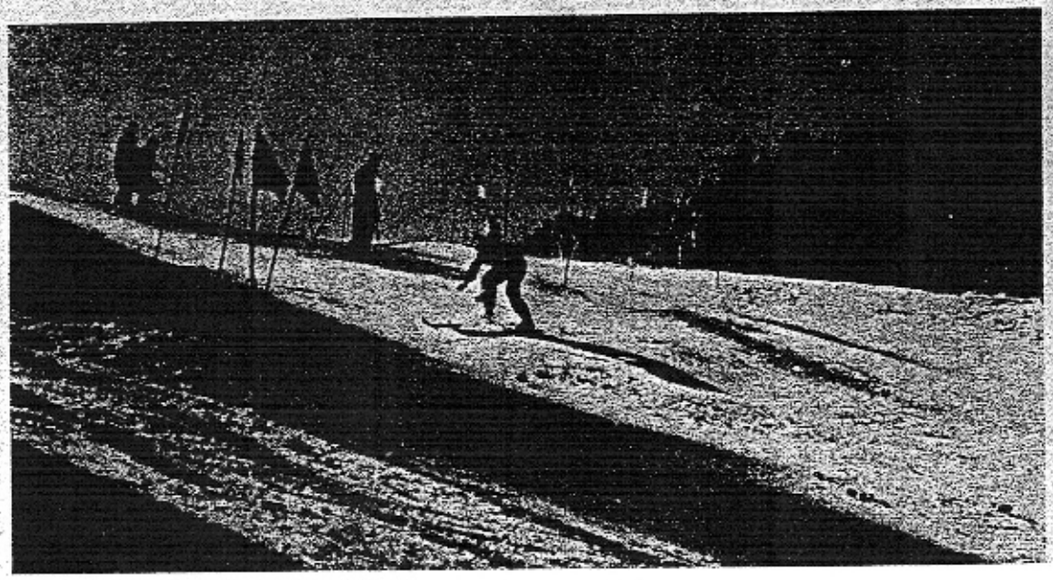
To a stricken skier, a capable member of the ski patrol bearing down upon him looks even better than a Saint Bernard with a cask around his neck.

Ski Club

Every grade of skier, from the novice to the advanced, can find a niche in the Ski Club. Newly formed this year, the club helped immeasurably to "put Midd on skis" with frequent lessons given by club members on Chapel Hill and at Breadloaf.

Snow shoe treks through the Vermont woods, and weekend ski hikes to areas such as famed Mad River Glen were but a few of the attractions that lured over fifty members into the Ski Club.

The club was formed because so many students in this supposedly ski-minded college were bewailing the fact that they wanted to master the hickories, but "never got around to it."

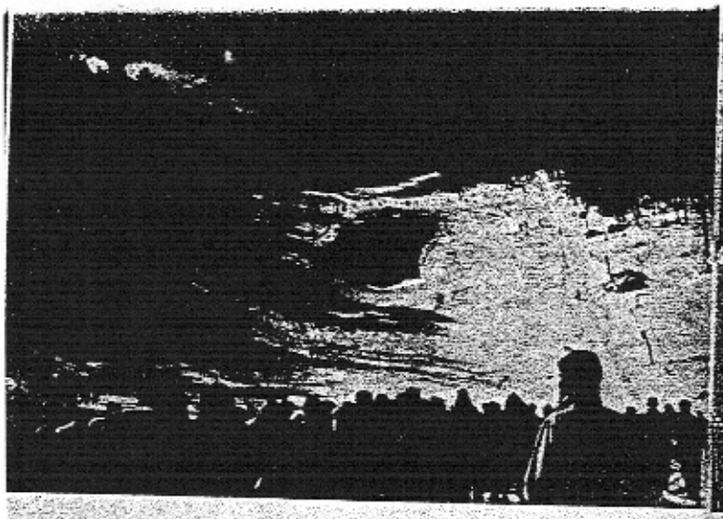


MASQUERADE BALL highlighted Winter Carnival in 1939. Today the costume is formal, and a special orchestra is featured at the Carnival Ball.

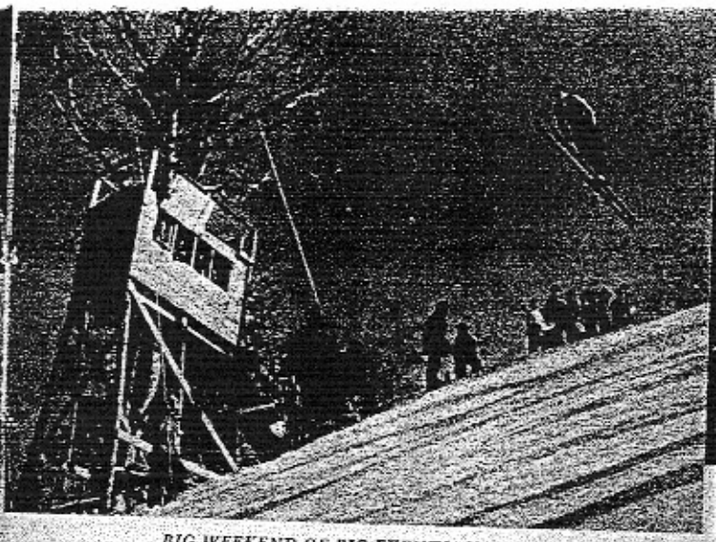
NO SNOW on Chipman Jump. The worst thing that could happen at Carnival.

FROZEN TOES AND NOSES line up during the ski races to get warm before the fire at the cabin on Breadloaf, 1950.

CARNIVAL BALL AT THE FIELD HOUSE. Lots of room to dance. Quite an improvement over the crowded conditions of the high school gym.



CARNIVAL CANDIDS—1950. Clockwise: Tex Beneke provides the best in musical entertainment; a big name band for a big name dance. The professional touch in Berquist fashion. A little food, a little warmth is all they ask. Queen Marvin, King Kailey, happy the rulers. The Slalom Slope, a dangerous descent for daring skiers.



BIG WEEKEND OF BIG EVENTS. Clockwise: It takes guts. The winner's trophy is presented to Middlebury's Captain Paul Kailey by Jim Ross, Carnival Co Chairman. "Life With Father" has not changed. Klondike Rush, the biggest and best!? The Middlebury knife slices Dartmouth off the Breadloaf.

when our forebearers wanted a four-day weekend, instead of the now conventional three-day weekend, ice shows, the crowning of the King and Queen, plays, and fraternity functions.

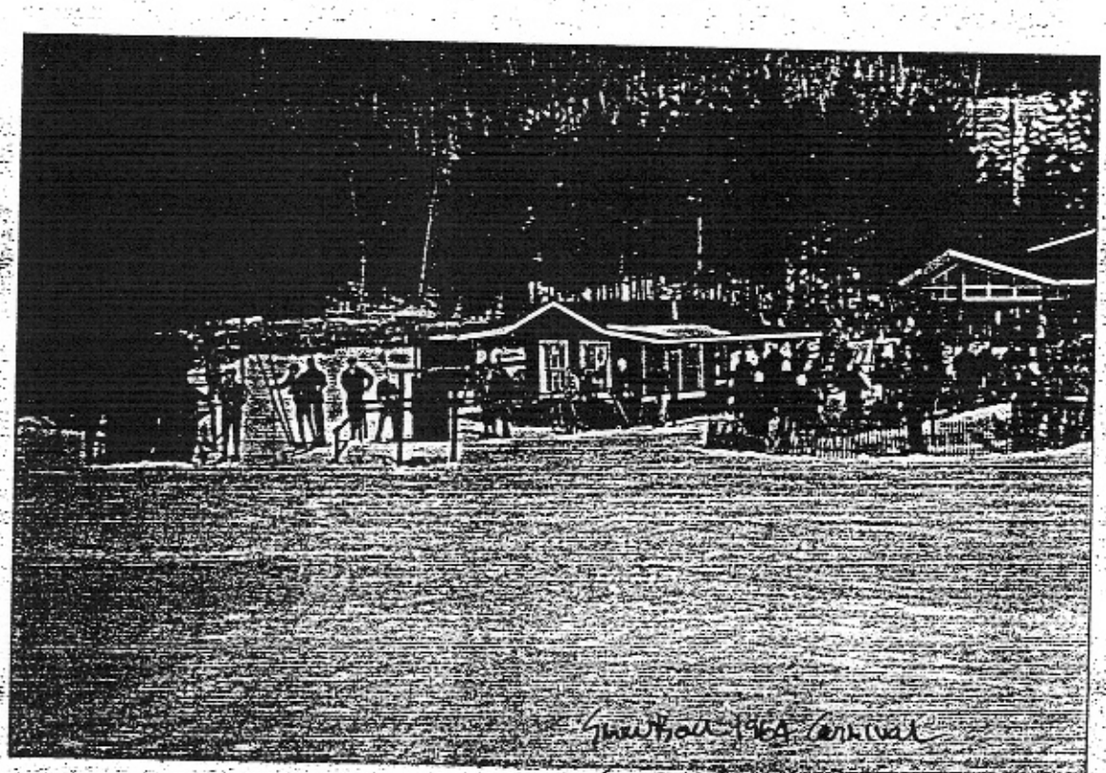
Winter Carnival, a name added in 1934, is sponsored by the Mountain Club. From late spring, when the co-chairmen are elected, to Carnival time, an almost inconceivable number of details are smoothed out; as planning gets farther along, committees are staffed and enthusiasm mounts, to be impeded, if at all, by lack of snow. Snow, the bane of a Carnival co-chairman's existence, usually stages an eleventh-hour arrival, sometimes with a vengeance, though occasionally some activities have had to be curtailed.

Carnival committees are made up of almost the entire student body. Each phase of Carnival activity has a separate committee in charge of the planning and carrying it out. Though Carnival is sponsored by the Mountain Club, non-members can head a committee, or even the whole weekend, if Skyline votes a non-Skyline person into the co-chairman's capacity. By outstanding work, and promise, the important committee co-chairmen are selected in the fall of the year. The job of a Winter Carnival committee is a long and a grueling one, but well worth the effort.

As Middlebury Winter Carnivals grew in popularity, facilities for holding the meets also improved. In 1923, after an abortive attempt to build a jump on Chapel Hill, skiing moved to Chipman Hill, and in the thirties it moved to Joseph Battell's Breadloaf Snow Bowl. In the early thirties, with the help of Middlebury students, townspeople, and the college, the Chipman Hill ski area was adorned with a thirty-five meter jump, which was completed in 1935. One year a ton and a half of hay had to be placed on the profile of the jump to protect the skiers; and another year snow had to be transported from Breadloaf.

The Intercollegiate Ski Union—known as the I.S.U.—came to Middlebury in 1938, and thereafter in 1940, 1941, 1942, 1946, 1948, 1949, and 1950. A win in senior I.S.U. competition, where Middlebury has steadily competed since 1938, gives the winner the Ski Championship Title of the East. Middlebury has won the I.S.U. Championship, and as a result, its own Winter Carnival in 1948 and again this year, 1950.

No, Middlebury has not always won, the bands have not always been popular, the weather has not always been right, a snow sculpture thought of by its builders as being the best has not always won the competition, a few may have suffered ruptures in their relationships with fond acquaintances of the opposite sex, but all in all, every class remembers Carnival with kind memories. Carnival through the years has typified the OLD MIDD SPIRIT.



Smithson 1964 Carnival
(Photo C Bennett '65)

Staci Patrice c. 1964
(Photo C. Bennett '65)